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ABSTRACT

This publication prsents guidelines for effective higher education instruction based on research into teaching and learning, on good practices, and on criteria used in teaching awards and in tenure and promotion procedures. Section 1 addresses university teachers and effective teaching practice and includes a list of seven specific practices for student learning, six effective practices for student assessment, and twelve effective practices for subject management. Section 2 looks at how departments can encourage effective teaching. Suggestions include the role of the department head in creating a learning environment for students, fostering a departmental climate where scholarship and inquiry are expected and where teachers reflect on and monitor how their teaching enhances student learning, and encouraging a high standard of courses and subjects offered through the department. Finally, Section 3 describes how institutions can value teaching through an institutional ethos and climate that can influence the status of teaching and the quality of the students' learning environments. Also included are 15 specific suggestions for ways that institutional commitment to the priority of the teaching can be shown. An attachment offers guidelines for quality assurance in course development and review. (JB)

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AV-CC

Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee

(ACN 008 502 930)

GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE UNIVERSITY TEACHING

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GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE UNIVERSITY TEACHING

COMMITMENT TO EFFECTIVE TEACHING

Australian universities are a part of an internationally recognised community of higher education and as such have, in common with their international peers, a particular responsibility to create, preserve, evaluate, interpret and transmit knowledge. While other institutions in society also contribute to these same objectives, it is a special responsibility of universities to foster and preserve the scholarly values of search for truth, of curiosity, integrity and critical appraisal, and to nurture these values in their students.

The AVCC sees diversity in functions, organisation and teaching as one of the chief strengths of the Australian university system. This is supported by the widely differing curricula offered in Australian universities. Effective teaching practice is sensitive to particular curricula in fostering those scholarly values.

The AVCC sees teaching as a creative activity designed to foster students' learning, their ability and desire to undertake scholarly work, and their development as a whole person. Teaching draws on professional and disciplinary expertise of staff and is continually revitalised by research, scholarship, consultancy, or professional practice.

The AVCC believes that the promotion of effective teaching should be a matter of highest priority for each university and that each institution needs to develop a coherent set of policies and practices which demonstrate that the institution values above all else the education of its students and the contributions that academic staff make to the enhancement of student learning.

These Guidelines for Effective University Teaching are based on research into teaching and learning, on good practices in institutions, and on criteria used in teaching awards, and in tenure and promotion procedures. The Guidelines set achievable goals, and government, institutions and academic staff are urged to implement them. The Guidelines focus on the responsibility of institutions, academic units and academic staff, as they are accountable for providing education in an environment conducive to learning. But underlying the Guidelines is the acknowledgment and expectation that students are active participants in the learning process and are central to the mission of every university.

1. THE UNIVERSITY TEACHER AND EFFECTIVE TEACHING PRACTICE

University teaching is a profession and a scholarly activity which draws on a high level of competence and expertise in the discipline and/or relevant professional experience together with highly developed communication and interpersonal skills.

As professionals, university teachers need to be appropriate role models and exhibit to their students a commitment to scholarly values, to life long learning, to professional and personal growth through critical reflection and self-evaluation, to accountability for their own professional activities, and to a responsible and ethical practice of their profession.

As university teachers, staff need to acquire and develop knowledge and understanding of a wide range of teaching and assessment methods and of the principles which underlie student learning.

They should work to instil in their students a respect for their discipline and for learning generally, the need for personal progress towards competence and maturity, and a commitment to maximise the opportunities that each graduate will have to contribute to society.

As scholars, university teachers need to contribute to their disciplines or at least be in touch with current research and scholarship, and to integrate into their teaching the knowledge and understanding which they or others create.

Students expect and value their university teachers competence in the subject areas they teach; effective communication of their knowledge and experience; interest in and enthusiasm for their subject; concern and respect for students as persons, and a commitment to facilitate learning for each individual student.

Indeed, all university teachers have a professional responsibility to teach their subjects in such a way that all students, regardless of their background or characteristics, have an equal opportunity to learn and to demonstrate that learning, in accordance with the aims of the subject. This means that good teaching practices vary in relation to:

(a) the context in which particular components of the course are offered, e.g.. co-operative education, clinical teaching, laboratory teaching, skills training, or distance education;
(b) the disciplines and their particular concerns;
(c) the students, e.g. school-leavers, special admission students, mature-age students, part-time students, overseas students, students with disabilities, students from non-English speaking backgrounds;
(d) the level and standards commonly agreed to, e.g. first year undergraduate, Honours, graduate level.

However, despite the diversity in effective teaching practice, there are some common aims and principles. Generally, university teaching aims to enable students to reach their highest possible level of learning during their time of enrolment, and to prepare them for life-long learning. In practice this means that staff collectively are responsible for ensuring that the design, management and teaching of their subjects facilitate effective learning by their students.

1.1 Student Learning

Effective university teachers:

1.1.1 provide students with opportunities to be involved in the structuring of their own learning experiences, and encourage them to take control of their own learning;

1.1.2 develop students' confidence by setting assignments which are challenging and relevant to subject aims, and by providing constructive and timely feedback;

1.1.3 develop students' analytical and critical thinking skills by demonstrating these skills, and providing students with tasks appropriate to the development of these skills;

1.1.4 provide learning experiences that will enable students to develop both individual initiative and the skills needed to work cooperatively with their peers;

1.1.5 assist in the development of students' communication skills by providing opportunities for oral, graphic and written presentations and for feedback on their performance;

1.1.6 encourage and enable students to evaluate their own and each other's work critically;

1.1.7 make time available for giving advice to and for supervising individual students.

1.2 Teaching and Assessment

Teaching encompasses a wide range of activities including one-to-one consultations, postgraduate supervision, classroom teaching, supervising students' practical experience in laboratories, clinics, schools and industry, supervising projects, advising students, assessing students' work, preparing teaching and course materials for on-campus and off-campus students, and contributing to course design and improvement and to curriculum development.

Assessment provides an evaluation of the student's competence in meeting specified objectives. But it is also an essential part of the teaching and learning process. Properly selected assessment tasks signal the importance of particular content, concepts and skills, influence approaches to study and help students to allocate their time appropriately. Constructive and timely feedback on assessment helps students to gain a sense of achievement and progress, an appreciation of the performance and standards expected in a particular discipline or professional area, and to learn from their endeavours.

Effective university teachers:

1.2.1 select from a range of teaching approaches and teaching media those which will help students to meet subject and their own learning objectives most effectively;

1.2.2 select from a range of assessment methods for each subject, a combination of methods which meets the criteria of validity, fairness, and appropriateness for subject goals and specify these clearly and unambiguously;

1.2.3 provide constructive and timely feedback on each student's achievement and progress;

1.2.4 communicate to students their enthusiasm for the subjects they teach and arouse students' curiosity and creative interest in the subject;

1.2.5 draw on students' life and work experiences in their teaching and, wherever possible, make the subject relevant to students' career goals and link theory with professional practice and societal concerns;

1.2.6 keep abreast of developments in their disciplines, and/or profession, and in higher education teaching and learning, ground their teaching in their own insights from and experiences in research and consultancy, and revise their subjects and teaching accordingly.

1.3 Subject Management

Subject management determines much of the learning environment for the students. Effective university teachers:

1.3.1 select content, skills and learning experiences in the subjects they design or teach which will foster students' intellectual and personal growth, and meet the requirement of the relevant profession;

1.3.2 express subject aims and objectives in the context of what students should expect to gain from their overall learning experience;

1.3.3 before enrolment, make available to students the aims and objectives of the subject, as well as assessment methods and timing, and the relative weight and number of assessment tasks so that students have guidance in subject choice and, once enrolled, can monitor their own progress towards the achievement of aims and objectives;

1.3.4 organise subject content coherently and at a level appropriate to the student group and level of study;

1.3.5 where appropriate, integrate field work and other off-campus activities such as industrial placements into the curriculum and organise them to enhance student learning;

1.3.6 liaise with colleagues teaching pre-requisite and subsequent subjects to ensure coherence in the course;

1.3.7 make use of other expertise, where appropriate, to provide breadth of course content;

1.3.8 discuss with colleagues, particularly part-time staff, who are teaching in the subject, the aims of the subject and how teaching and assessment are designed to help students to realise subject aims;

1.3.9 encourage part-time staff teaching in their subject to make use of available professional development opportunities;

1.3.10 monitor teaching and assessment by part-time staff teaching in their subjects;

1.3.11 make sure that all resources which students are asked to use for effective learning in a subject are available, e.g. library books, computer terminals, audio-visual materials, laboratory equipment, and placements;

1.3.12 review regularly the content and focus of a subject, make revisions as required, and reflect critically upon their own teaching using feedback from a variety of sources to ascertain to what extent they are being successful in helping students realise their own as well as subject aims.

2. DEPARTMENTAL ENCOURAGEMENT OF EFFECTIVE TEACHING

In the course of undergraduate and postgraduate degree studies, students are likely to make contact with up to several dozen tertiary teachers. While each one may have a significant impact (positive or negative) on a student, students are at least equally influenced by the ethos of the departments (the term 'department' denotes here all basic academic units) in which they study and by the experience of the whole program of study undertaken.

Departments as much as institutions and individuals can give teaching and students a high or low priority - students experience this in their daily interaction with departmental staff inside and outside the classroom. Departments set the curriculum or part of it, establish conventions for teaching and assessing, for one-to-one consultation, and for involving students in subject and teaching reviews. Departments also need to establish an ethos where academics feel free and are

encouraged and supported to teach and assess in innovative ways, and where all students, but particularly those involved in research studies, feel valued as partners in learning.

The institution, the faculties, Heads of Department and all teaching staff share collegially the responsibility for the standard of teaching and the quality of the learning environment. An environment conducive to learning is open, *inter alia*, to student input into reviews of courses and subjects, and the development of new ones. Despite the shared responsibility, in particular with professors in the department and with course coordinators, there are specific responsibilities which Heads of Department have as part of their administrative and academic leadership roles.

2.1 Students

Heads of Department are responsible for their department as a learning environment for students. They acknowledge this responsibility by:

2.1.1 ensuring that university policies and guidelines affecting teaching, learning and interaction with students are implemented, including those on student assessment, supervision of postgraduate students, equity issues and ethical conduct;

2.1.2 acknowledging in the distribution of staff workloads the important task of counselling and assisting individual students, particularly those with special needs;

2.1.3 establishing procedures for seeking regular feedback from students on all matters affecting them in their studies and for involving them, where appropriate, in decisions and discussions affecting their learning;

2.1.4 providing induction procedures for new students.

2.2 Academic Staff

Heads of Department encourage effective teaching by fostering a departmental climate and conventions in which scholarship and inquiry are expected and encouraged; university teachers are committed to reflecting on and monitoring how their teaching enhances student learning; staff are open to giving and receiving feedback from their peers, and are committed to the department's goal of excellence in teaching and working collaboratively. In particular, effective Heads:

2.2.1 initiate regular departmental discussions and reviews of teaching, learning and assessment, involving also student representatives, and, where feasible, external members of course advisory committees or school/faculty boards;

2.2.2 review regularly with individual staff their contribution to teaching and learning in the department and the assistance they may need in developing their understanding of teaching strategies and learning processes;

2.2.3 provide opportunities and incentives for staff, both full-time and part-time, and particularly for those new to tertiary teaching, to develop their knowledge and skills in teaching diverse groups of students and their understanding of learning processes; such opportunities may include undertaking an award course (e.g. graduate certificate in higher education), and participate in seminars and conferences on teaching and learning.

2.2.4 assist new staff in their teaching role through a variety of means, by providing induction into the teaching ethos of the department, giving them a reduced teaching and administrative load to enable them to develop their teaching skills, appointing a departmental mentor where appropriate, and providing other professional development opportunities;

2.2.5 encourage the collaborative development of courses and subjects, and investigations of innovative ways of teaching and assessing, by making available time and resources to individuals and teams;

2.2.6 support staff who are seeking promotion on the basis of excellent teaching;

2.2.7 encourage research into teaching and learning within the disciplinary or professional context;

2.2.8 provide an appropriate role model for academic staff.

2.3 Courses and Subjects

Heads of Department encourage a high standard of courses and subjects offered through their department by:

2.3.1 ensuring that each course and subject makes explicit the teaching methods to be applied, has clear and appropriate aims and objectives, and that these are made known to students to help guide their course and subject choice; and ensuring that assessment practices and criteria reflect these aims and objectives, are communicated to students clearly, and are not amended without reference to the students affected;

2.3.2 undertaking regular diagnostic reviews of courses and subjects, including reviews of failure rates, attrition rates and student workloads, an assessment of whether courses and subjects constitute intellectually challenging and stimulating learning experiences and are being taught at an appropriate level, are consistent with the stated educational objectives, and are meeting the needs of students, employers, the professions and the community; and, where necessary, taking appropriate corrective action.

3. INSTITUTIONAL VALUING OF TEACHING

Institutional ethos and climate influence the status of teaching within the institution and the quality of the students' learning environments. Institutional commitment to the priority of teaching would be shown by:

3.1 mission statements or aims which express the educational ethos of the institution and how it might be realised;

3.2 administrative practices, and practices associated with teaching-related services, which support the educational ethos of the institution;

3.3 adequate resources for effective teaching and learning, e.g. appropriately appointed classrooms, libraries, computer facilities, laboratories, and learning skills centres as well as support and technical staff, and the means of assuring that resources are applied effectively to achieve desired educational outcomes;

3.4 allocation of responsibilities which allows staff time to consult with individual students, and to conduct teaching as a scholarly activity instead of as a routine task;

3.5 a policy on academic appointments that encourages the recruitment of individuals with demonstrated teaching commitment, and on tenure and promotion which give teaching parity of esteem with research;

3.6 policies on matters affecting student learning opportunities, for example, policies on assessment and supervision of postgraduate students;

3.7 policies addressing ethical issues which might arise in the relationship between staff and students, for example, issues of abuse of power and rights to intellectual property;

3.8 professional experience or study leave programs or provisions which allow for a focus on teaching, course design, teaching materials and curriculum development;

3.9 professional development programs, personnel or units to assist all staff in defining and enhancing their teaching role and, in particular, programs aimed at the induction of staff new to teaching, including formal courses leading to certification;

3.10 the availability of funds for exploring, developing and implementing new approaches to teaching aimed at improvement of student learning;

3.11 publications which describe and commend effective teaching and learning environments within the institution;

3.12 mechanisms for identifying and funding learning enhancement strategies, including English as a Second Language support, and literacy and numeracy support programs;

3.13 procedures for the review of new and existing courses to ensure that programs of study are coherent, properly organised, and that they provide students with learning experiences that meet the program aims and that assess students in ways consistent with these aims;

3.14 procedures for regular contributions from students and external groups (e.g. employers and professional associations) into the development of teaching and learning practices and the design or review of courses;

3.15 a framework for enabling an institution to review and change institutional practices related to the quality of teaching and learning, and for managing change.

The AVCC recommends that each institution develop, within the framework set by these Guidelines, its own set of guidelines which reflect institutional ethos and priorities.

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AVCC GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN UNIVERSITY COURSE DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW

Introduction

The Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) regards this Guide as an important contribution to the development and maintenance of quality assurance mechanisms in universities. Adoption of the practices identified below and modified where appropriate to meet local needs, will provide universities with a means of demonstrating that their course development and review procedures provide an important contribution to their quality assurance mechanisms and evidence of the steps taken to ensure that accountability requirements are met

The guidelines have been developed so that universities can adopt them, where appropriate, to:

- demonstrate that courses are consistent with, and assist in, the achievement of institutional mission and objectives;
- make clear the purpose and objectives of each of the courses offered by each university;
- contribute to monitoring, maintenance and improvement of standards and quality;
- support and enhance student learning;
- demonstrate to interested parties the detailed procedures followed in course development;

The following encapsulation of much of the current best practice within Australian universities will assist in fulfilling these objectives, by providing universities with a useful model which can be adapted to suit local requirements.

Development of new Course Proposals

Effective course development will include the following steps:

1 The establishment of administrative mechanisms and procedures to ensure that administrative, academic and resource implications are thoroughly examined and that there are well publicised and commonly accepted routes for course development proposals to be considered, rejected, revised and/or adopted.

2 Development of preliminary plan and discussion within universities, stating the perceived need for the course and setting out the relationship of the proposed course to the university's mission and strategic plans. Initial proposals for courses may spring from departmental innovation, special reviews undertaken in response to advances in knowledge, university restructuring, inter-departmental discussions, evidence of demand arising from consultations with students and graduates, discussions with professional bodies or employers, or in response to perceived national or local priorities.

3 Preparation of a formal detailed proposal which includes:

- the purpose of the program of study,
- the academic content, structure, and level of the program and the learning objectives,
- assessment practices and criteria which reflect the aims and objectives of the course,
- the teaching methodology to be employed;
- the lines of responsibility for the conduct of the course,
- comment on resource implications, including support services
- the place of the new proposal within the university's profile and the impact on the university,
- impact on other courses,
- outline of the ways by which the course will be regularly evaluated;

4 Wider consultation involving and inviting comment from the community, relevant professional associations, students and groups largely composed of academic and professional peers to assess matters such as the demand and necessity for the course and the amount of support which can be given to it.

5 Detailed proposal to be subjected to formal accreditation processes of the university involving the senior academic bodies of the university.

6 Inclusion of the course in the university's educational profile.

7 Notification of the new course to the Register of Tertiary Education (RATE) and publication and promulgations of its availability.

8 Establishment of review mechanisms and timetables.

Monitoring and review of existing programs of study

The effective delivery of university courses also depends on universities having in place appropriate mechanisms for the monitoring of existing programs of study to ensure that they continue to operate to fulfil institutional mission and objectives.

Universities need to ensure that reviews of all courses are undertaken on a rolling basis so that every course is regularly reviewed on a similar basis as that established for the development of new courses.

Effective course review will involve:

- Examination of each course in the context of the changes which have taken place since its development and/or last review, and as for course development will focus on
  - the purpose of the program of study and its continuing relevance,
  - the academic content, structure, and level of the program and the learning objectives,
  - the continuing appropriateness of the assessment practices and criteria to the aims and objectives of the course,
  - the lines of responsibility for the conduct of the course,
  - comment on any changes to the resource implications, including support services
  - the place of the course within the university's current profile and its contribution to the university's goals and mission,
  - impact on other courses, particularly newer courses,
  - comment on the operation and success of the course from professional associations, their client base, employers, students and graduates.

- systematic collection and analysis of data on matters such as application and enrolment rates, entry standards, non-completion rates, degree results, employability;

- detailed analysis of these data undertaken first at departmental or school level, and then by faculty or academic board, involving professional bodies where appropriate and peer review input leading to recommendations for expansion, revision or cessation made to the senior academic bodies of the university.

- inclusion of changes to the university's educational profile and notification of significant changes to the Register of Australian Tertiary Education (RATE).

The AVCC recommends that each university develop, within the framework set out in these guidelines, its own set of course development guidelines which reflect the institution's own structure and priorities.